
“Querida Amazonia”. Card. Barreto Jimeno: “A powerful harbinger of hope”

Starting from its title, Querida Amazonia, this document highlights the Pope's love for the Amazon, its peoples, its culture. It neither replaces nor replicates the final document of the Synod, instead it gives new impetus to an additional common journey. Under the banner of what Pope Francis calls "dreams". "If you dream alone, - pointed out Cardinal **Pedro Barreto Jimeno** - your dream remains only a dream, but if it is a shared dream, it starts to turn into reality." The Peruvian Cardinal commented on the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Querida Amazonia. Cardinal Barreto, a Jesuit, Archbishop of Huancayo (Peru) Vice-President of the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network (REPAM), was undoubtedly a leading figure both in the preparatory phase and in the Vatican Synod (he was among the presidents delegates of the assembly and is a member of the Special Council for the Pan-Amazon region).

Your Eminence, let's start with the title. Querida Amazonia seems to express a special affection. Is it really so?

Yes, no other words are needed. It expresses the closeness of the Church to the Amazon, her closeness and her service to the peoples inhabiting this territory, to their cultures, to the protection of this lung of the world. It clearly indicates that this is not just a pre-eminent choice of the Pope, but the result of a long journey of evangelization, of a long history marked by affection for the native peoples.

What are the main features of the Exhortation, in your view?

It stresses the importance of the Amazon, not only as a territorial space, but above all with an emphasis on the people and on the indigenous populations specifically. Theirs is a cry to the world, they have been ill-treated and disrespected throughout history. The Pope's document reminds us of the need for integral human development and respect for inalienable human rights. There is another aspect: the enhancement of the cultural richness of these peoples in their vision of the world and of nature, in their spirituality. We are accustomed to the primacy of Western culture, but in reality every cultural expression can make a great contribution. There is, furthermore, a third aspect, which I find fundamental: the Synodal journey, which began in January 2018 in the Peruvian Amazon, on the occasion of the Pope's visit to Puerto Maldonado, is continuing.

The Synod and the Exhortation are not the end of the journey.

What does that entail?

It entails that the need to listen and walk together with the Churches and peoples of the Amazon remains a central factor. The Pope does not intend to replace or replicate the outcomes of the Synod, the fruit of a long process of listening. Those of us who participated can bear witness to this act of listening and walking together. The Exhortation does not propose strict instructions. It features the idea of a journey that continues, starting from the Synod and the Encyclical *Laudato Si'*. I, for one, am enthusiastic about this clear thrust to walk together and, most importantly, with the poorest.

The path calls for conversion. Does it remain a central theme in the Pope's reflection?

I see a strong connection between the common journey and conversion, inviting us to renew our attention for indigenous peoples, or for women. Conversion to God, to our brothers and sisters and to the common Home remains a decisive point, highlighted in the Final Document of the Synod, which mentions four types of conversion: social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial. The Pope said he seconds these conclusions. In *Querida Amazonia*, however, Francis moves a step further, speaking not so much of conversion but of dreams. He uses this image. It can be said that the Exhortation adopts the call to conversion but offers a new insight, speaking of dreams which, also in this case, involve the social, cultural, ecological and ecclesial spheres. The Pope expresses himself with great clarity, he dreams of a Gospel that is lived in accordance with the indications of the *Laudato Si*.

There was great anticipation also with regard to the part on ministry and in particular on the possibility that married men might be ordained. The Pope doesn't mention it much in the Exhortation...

Indeed, Francis does not openly address the ministerial dimension and the specific question of the so-called *viri probati*, that is, the priestly ordination of married men. The Pope, however, states that he does not replace or repeat in its entirety the Final Document of the Synod, where this possibility is mentioned. He accepts what is written there and does not repeat it, he does not reiterate it. I believe that the central issue here is the situation of people living in remote areas without the possibility of receiving the Eucharist frequently. Saint John Paul II said that without the Eucharist there is no Church. The question is focused on this aspect, it should not be seen as a dispute, as someone's victory or defeat. It is a matter of responding to the needs of people who are deprived of the Eucharist.

The fact remains that the Pope is encountering much resistance from those in positions of economic and political power. Opposition is found even inside the Church. What do you think of this dissent?

It's a very timely question. Indeed, the Pope faces resistance from those with economic, political and even ecclesial power. This is what happened to Jesus, as he experienced all three. Resistance is a normal thing when a path of renewal is being pursued, which is ultimately a path of evangelization. I think that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church along the paths that John XXIII dreamed of when he opened the Second Vatican Council, and that Pope Francis dreamed of when he said at the beginning of his pontificate: "I would like a Church that is poor and for the poor."

To conclude, which hopes do you draw from the publication of *Querida Amazonia*?

It's a powerful harbinger of hope. The Church definitively stands as an ally of the Amazonian peoples and the Exhortation confers a great responsibility on us pastors, called to encourage acts of listening, honest dialogue, to ingrain it in our skin and in our culture, not forgetting that the goal is evangelization, not to conceal or belittle the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

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